

# UNISON SOUTH EAST BLACK MEMBERS NEWSLETTER

## AUTUMN 2024



**Co-Chairs:** Jed Murray and Sandra Charles

**Committee Members:** Abdul Rahman, Bernard Marengereke, Bill Acharjee, Fatima Kamara, Hasina Hamid, Kathy-Ann Mark-Evans, Shirley Owens, Tunde Majekodunmi, Deborah Southward, Humma Younis, Lourdes Madisgasekera-Elliot, Olusola Adejare, Sybil Msezane, Xoliskia Cox

Interested in joining the committee:

Contact Mumta Erkadoo at [m.erkadoo@unison.co.uk](mailto:m.erkadoo@unison.co.uk)



### Co-Chairs report

Congratulations to Sussex Police - who on 16 August 2024 became the first employer in the South East region to sign up to UNISON's Anti Racism Charter (ARC). The signing ceremony involved Chief Officers, Steve Torrance Regional Secretary, Jed Murray Regional Convenor and members of UNISON's Regional Management Team at Sussex police HQ in Lewes. Buoyed by this and recent successes in the Greater London region, I am encouraged by reports that negotiations have been taking place with a range of employers in the South East region. If you're unsure how to make it happen, support from your Regional Officer has made it a much easier proposition for branches to encourage employers to understand the benefits to their Black employees and their workforce.

East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service are also keen to know more about ARC and how it could complement their own EDI strategy. The fire service has suffered with public image problems in recent times over their handling of racism and sexism within the service nationally. We have been promoting ARC via PowerPoint and Q&A sessions with management teams and employee stakeholders to encourage them to sign up. Similar negotiations are taking place with British Transport Police, East Sussex County Council, the YOU Trust and many other public sector employers in the region.

Signing up to ARC sends a powerful message that racism won't be tolerated. By gaining the recognition of UNISON's 1.3 million members, who say racism has no place at work or in wider society. So, if you haven't yet, please start those conversations with your branches, RO's and employers. Let's make 'ARC' a real success story in the SE and show the other regions how it's done by getting your employer to sign up.

SOG conference season is fast approaching with the National Disabled members conference being held this year in Brighton (October), a number of our regional activists are involved. The national LGBT+ conference is due (Edinburgh, November). Solidarity with our trans colleagues is more important than ever as they continue to be targeted by the right-wing media and scapegoated by politicians. National Young members conference (Swansea December), followed by national Black members (Llandudno January 2025) and national Women's conference (Edinburgh February 2025). Please make sure your delegates are registered in good time.

'Trans Pride' 27<sup>th</sup> July, was very well attended, I was proud of our activists representing the South East region. Special shout out to Jon Woods, Portsmouth City branch and regional activists for supporting the 'Stand Up to Racism' demo against the EDL, far-right bullyboys and others with ultra-nationalist ideologies, who I observed gathering very conspicuously at Waterloo on the day.



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Kathy-Ann Mark-Evans, SE LGBT+ at Maidstone's first ever Pride, 22.6.2024

Some feedback from Kathy-Ann Mark-Evans during the year of the LGBT+ Workers after visiting the Pride event:

The Year of the LGBT+ Workers signifies a period of increased visibility and advocacy for LGBT+ people. With UNISON actively promoting awareness of related issues in the Year of LGBT+ workers, we have the opportunity to highlight not only the challenges currently faced in the public, media, and workplaces but also to celebrate the progress the community has made. It is a time for recognising achievements and continuing the fight for equality. As a Black LGBT+ woman and co-chair of the regional committee, I have noticed a distinct lack of visibility for Black LGBT+ people within LGBT+ groups and committees. Research by Stonewall indicates that over half of Black LGBT people have faced discrimination or poor treatment within their own LGBT + community due to their ethnicity (as reported in "LGBT in Britain - Home and Communities," 2018). Intersectional identities, such as those involving both race and sexuality, are complex and become even more intricate when combined. Being Black and gay in the UK today impacts daily life significantly.



Whether it's feeling excluded from queer spaces because of race or feeling alienated from one's community because of sexuality, these are just a couple of examples of the challenges encountered when these identities intersect. One of my proudest achievements is being the first Black LGBT+ co-chair of the SE Regional LGBT+ Committee. This position not only allows me to represent a community that often lacks visibility but also enables me to push for greater inclusion and recognition of intersectional identities within the broader LGBT+ movement.



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## National Delegate Conference 18-21 June 2024



Palestine dominated the conferences. An address on Thursday by Dr Husam Zomlot, the Palestinian Ambassador. His speech pulled no punches on the desperate conditions of the Palestinian people but also gave hope that Israel is becoming increasingly isolated and will be forced to change.

I spoke to conference giving a damning indictment of the government's response, or lack of one, to the victims of the Windrush scandal, because, for those who have been affected by the Windrush scandal, justice has still not been done. The scandal, which came to national attention in 2018, caused thousands of people to be wrongfully designated as living illegally in the UK, despite being British citizens.

We need to continue to remind everyone that the journey towards justice continues and that this scandal does not define the rich contribution of the Windrush generation in putting the 'Great' back into 'Britain'," However, it does define the way in which the Windrush generation and descendants have been and continue to be treated. It's a disgrace that the Windrush Generation, families, and our communities are still fighting for justice.

I attended the launch of the Ethnicity Pay Gap (EPG) toolkit fringe. This was dedicated to tackling the ethnicity pay gap within our workplaces. The tool kit is a follow-on from the Black Workers Tool Kit that was launched last year. The discussion was centred around what strategies activists can take to engage with employers to break barriers, review policies, and make sure pay claims also include pay disparity to address this inequality. The Labour Party has committed in its manifesto to make EPG compulsory for employers.

Wednesday evening included an inspiring speech from UNISON Vice President Julia Mwaluke, a magic trick from a delegate from the GRT (Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller) community, and a hard-hitting rap from Queen Nellie. This was followed by a Love Music Hate Racism Social of soul, funk, and reggae with the Camden branch Secretary as the DJ.

A highlight on Friday the last day of the conference was when representatives of the many UNISON strikes marched to the front of the Conference and were given a rousing standing ovation. There have been many successful UNISON disputes and some ongoing ones, such as the Barnet Social Workers who were present.

**Sandra Charles**

**Co-Chair Southeast Regional Black Members**



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## Anti-racism Charter signed by Sussex Police

**Sussex Police have become the first public sector employer in the south east to sign up to UNISON's anti racism charter**

The force's assistant chief officer Anita Grant signed the charter, which aims to tackle racism in public services, in a ceremony on Friday 16 August 2024. The document commits organisations and their leaders to having a clear and visible race equality policy and comprehensive anti-racism initiatives, such as training for all staff.

Under the charter's terms, Sussex Police will promote a diverse workforce, address the impact of racism on staff wellbeing, and regularly review strategies to improve racial equality, diversity and inclusion.

The charter is part of a wider UNISON campaign to combat racism in the workplace and ensure organisations reflect the communities they serve.

**UNISON South East regional secretary Steve Torrance** said: "Unions have an important role to play in combatting the politics of hate in their communities and workplaces.

"The anti-racism charter is a powerful way for leaders to work with their staff to ensure racism has no place in the public sector. "It's great to see Sussex Police become the first employer in the region to sign, and we look forward to working with them to make it a success."



**Find out how you can get your branch involved on the [UNISON South East website](https://www.unison.org.uk/south-east)**



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### Why does the far-right exist and why do they harbour animosity towards the Muslim community?

**Written By: Bill Acharjee, Southeast Black Members Committee, University of Brighton UNISON Branch**

I'm sure everyone has been deeply troubled by the recent wave of Islamophobia and racist violence and riots incited by far-right groups, specifically targeting Muslim communities and Mosques across the UK. Although, these appalling attacks have been driven by hatred and misinformation, which has contributed towards the fear and suffering of so many Black communities who are still too afraid to leave their houses, we have also seen a rise of fascism across Europe which has predominantly been facilitated by right-wing politicians and mainstream media narratives that persistently scapegoat migrants and refugees instead of addressing the underlying systemic inequalities affecting many individuals in the country.

But why do the far-right exist and why do they harbour animosity towards the 'Muslim' community? The reasons are complex and can vary depending on specific ideologies and contexts. Here are some common factors that I have found that contribute towards this hostility:

- **Perceived Threat to Cultural Identity:** Some on the far-right view Islam as a threat to their national or cultural identity. They may believe that Muslim immigrants or communities challenge traditional values, customs, or ways of life that they hold dear.
- **Security Concerns:** There is a perception among some that Muslims pose a security threat, especially in the context of terrorism or extremism. High-profile terrorist attacks committed by individuals who claim Islamic motivations have fuelled fears and stereotypes.
- **Fear of Immigration and Demographic Change:** The far-right often opposes immigration in general, viewing it as diluting national identity or resources. Muslims, particularly those from non-European backgrounds, are often singled out in discussions about immigration.
- **Religious and Ideological Differences:** Some on the far-right view Islam as incompatible with Western values, such as individual freedoms, gender equality, or secular governance. They may see Islam as promoting values that are seen as regressive or oppressive.
- **Media Portrayals and Propaganda:** Negative portrayals of Muslims in the media or by political figures can reinforce stereotypes and biases, leading to increased hostility. Far-right groups may use these portrayals to further their own agendas.
- **Historical Precedents:** Historical conflicts, such as the Crusades or more recent geopolitical tensions involving Muslim-majority countries, can contribute to a narrative of distrust or enmity towards Muslims.

**Misinformation and Social Media:** The rise of social media has significantly amplified far-right propaganda. Figures like Tommy Robinson use these platforms to spread false narratives and encourage attacks on Muslim communities. The rapid spread of such misinformation contributes to the growing hostility and fear within these communities.

In conclusion, the attitudes of the far-right towards Muslims are shaped by a combination of political, social, and cultural factors that vary widely across different regions and contexts, as such, there is still a lot of work to eradicate racism.

It has been encouraging to see that the Labour government and Police services have dealt with perpetrators effectively and efficiently, however, my advice to all Black members is to remain vigilant when walking alone, especially in less crowded areas or at night. Keep your surroundings in mind, avoid distractions like headphones, and trust your instincts. If you feel uncomfortable, move to a well-lit, populated area or call someone you trust. Your safety is paramount

— take extra care!



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Across the UK, UNISON branches, employers and community groups will be celebrating the history of Black people in the workplace by organising workshops and events for Black History Month. Black History Month is an opportunity to provide information about the perspectives and experiences of Black People, promote multiculturalism, and acknowledge Black people's contributions to British society and history.

## What can you do in your branch?

Your branch can get involved in Black History Month activities following some of the examples given here or using your own ideas.

- Organise an open-house event at your branch
- Invite Black members to come along and learn about the work of UNISON and how it benefits them
- Provide refreshments and ensure the venue is accessible
- Get your branch committee involved

Find out more about the history of Black trade unionism on our website

[Black History Month](#) | [Black members equality](#) | [UNISON National](#)

## 2025 National Black Members Conference

17-19 January 2025: Venue Cymru, The Promenade, Penrhyn Cres, Llandudno, LL30 1BB

### Registration and Enquiries

If you want to attend the conference, please contact your branch who can register you as a delegate or visitor on the Online Conference System (OCS). Once you are



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